

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

By T. S. Eliot

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu
scosse.*

*Ma perciocche giammai di questo
fondo*

*Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il
vero, Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

If I believed that my answer were
to a person who should ever
return to the world, this flame
would stand without further
movement; but since never one
returns alive from this deep, if I
hear true, I answer you without
fear of infamy.



Guido da Montefeltro, a false counselor concealed within a flame

Dante's The Inferno, Canto XXVII, 61-66



Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;

“You and I” refers to an
argument he’s having with
himself

Contrast to the traditional way of looking at
evening, as shown in this poem by Wordsworth:

It is a beauteous evening calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility;

--Wordsworth

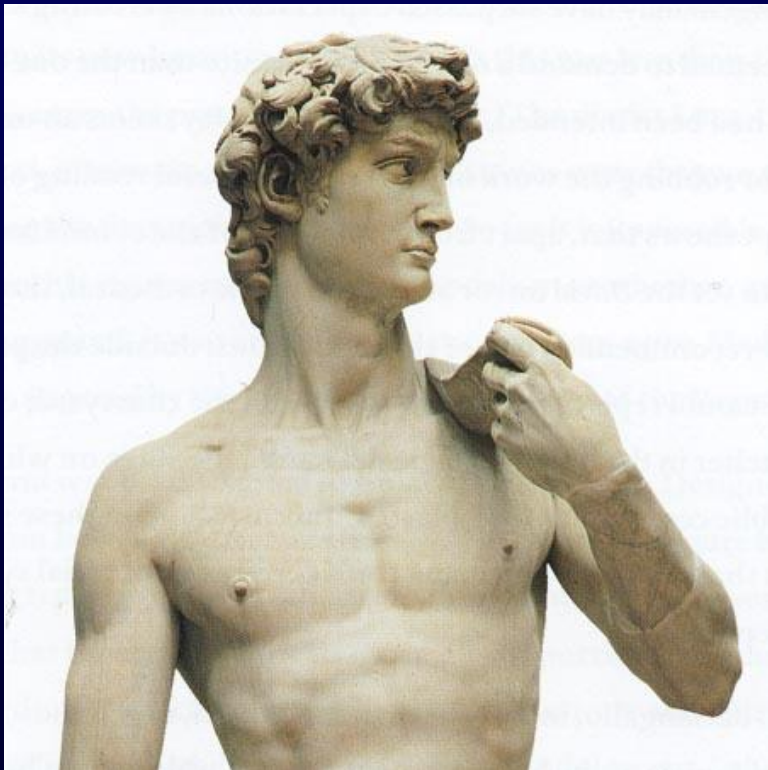
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:





Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.



The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.



The yellow fog reminds us of
Sandberg's poem; the color yellow,
though, signals a sick feeling.

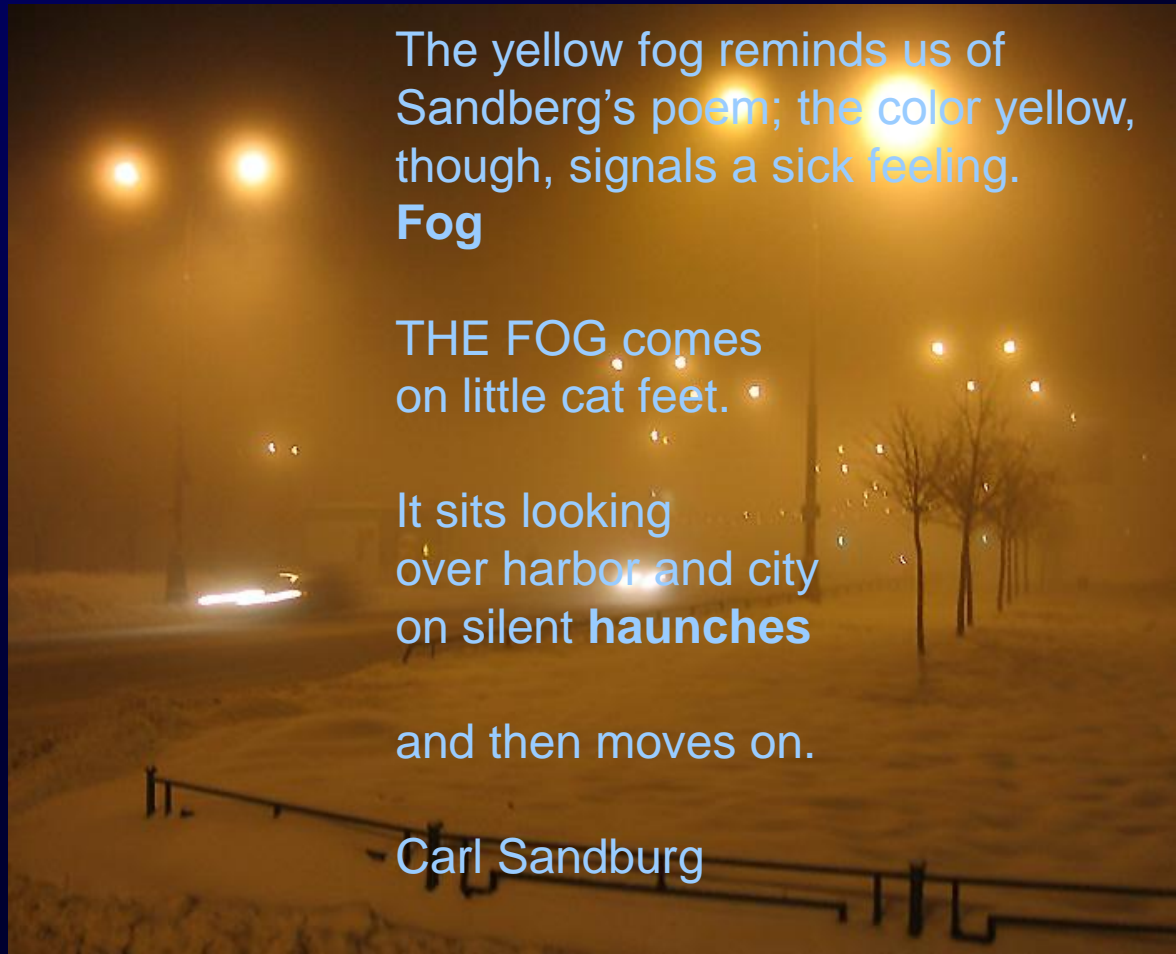
Fog

THE FOG comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent **haunches**

and then moves on.

Carl Sandburg



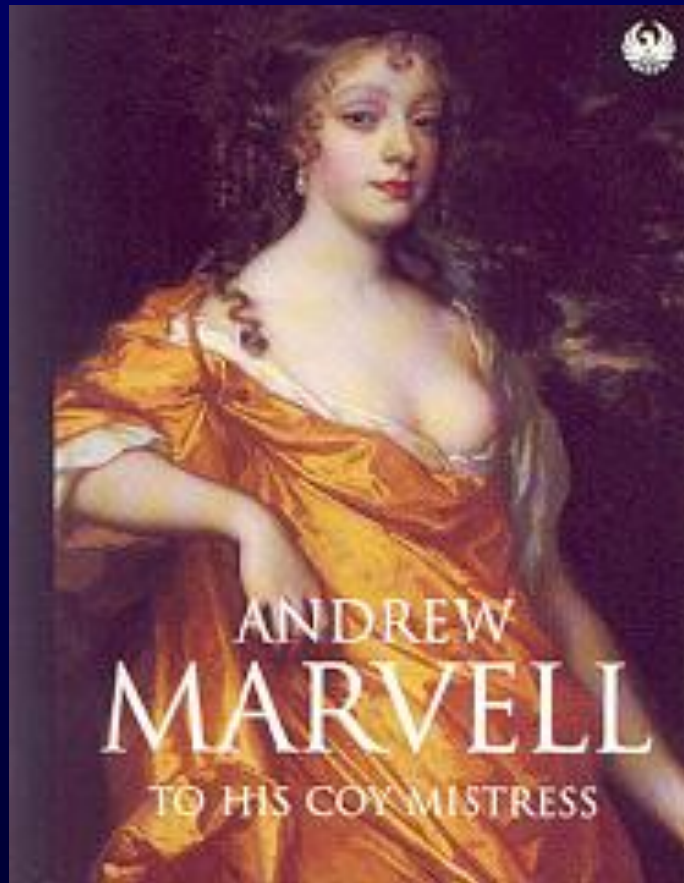
And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the windowpanes;



An allusion to Ecclesiastes 3.1-8

1 To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.



These lines allude to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day;
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.





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And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")

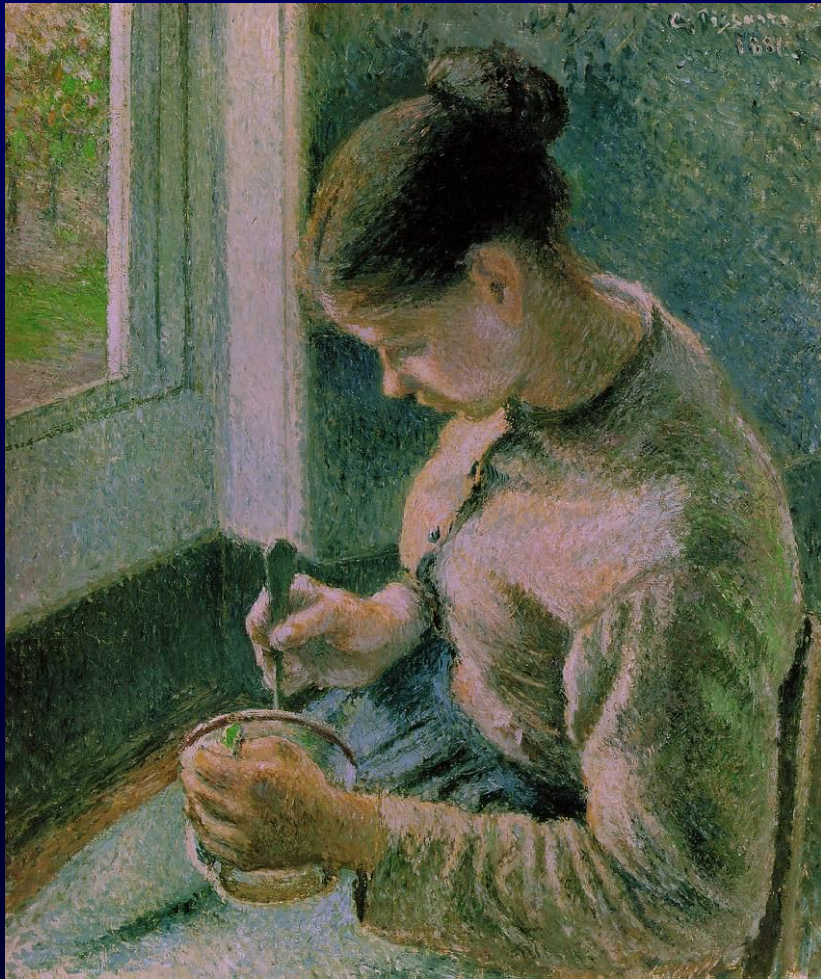
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin--
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")



A large, bright yellow and white mushroom cloud from a nuclear explosion rises from a dark, rocky landscape. The cloud has a thick, billowing stem and a large, glowing, oval-shaped head. The background is a dark, hazy sky.

In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;



I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it; that surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again, it had a **dying fall**;
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing an giving odor.

Duke Orsino, *Twelfth Night*, (I. i. 1-7)



And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,



Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?



And I have known the arms already, known them all--
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)

"The Relic" by John Donne

When my grave is broken up again
Some second guest to entertain
(For graves have learned that woman-head
To be to more than one a bed),
And he that digs it, spies
A **bracelet of bright hair** about the bone,
Will he not let'us alone,
And think that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way
To make their souls, at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?



Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.

And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

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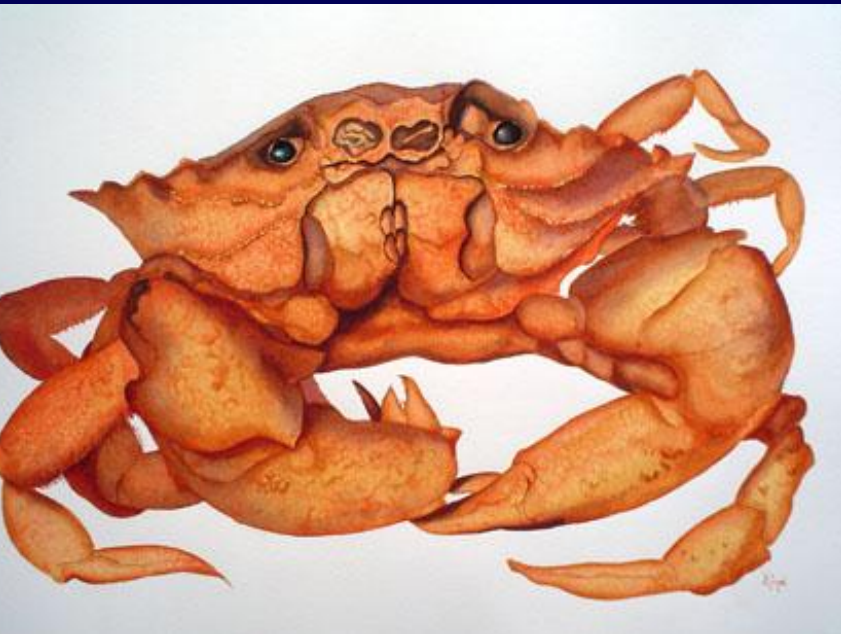




PHOTO © PETER VISONTAY

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

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Hamlet. Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams; all of which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, **for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.**

Polonius. [Aside] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't--Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

And the afternoons, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.

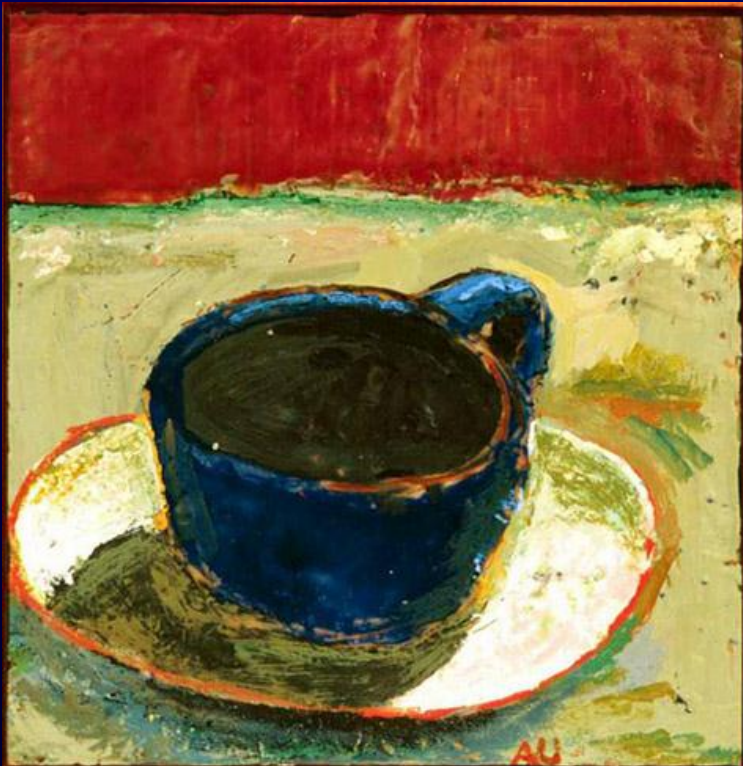




But though I have **wept and fasted**, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a **platter**,
I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And, in short, I was afraid.



And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,





To say: ' I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'--





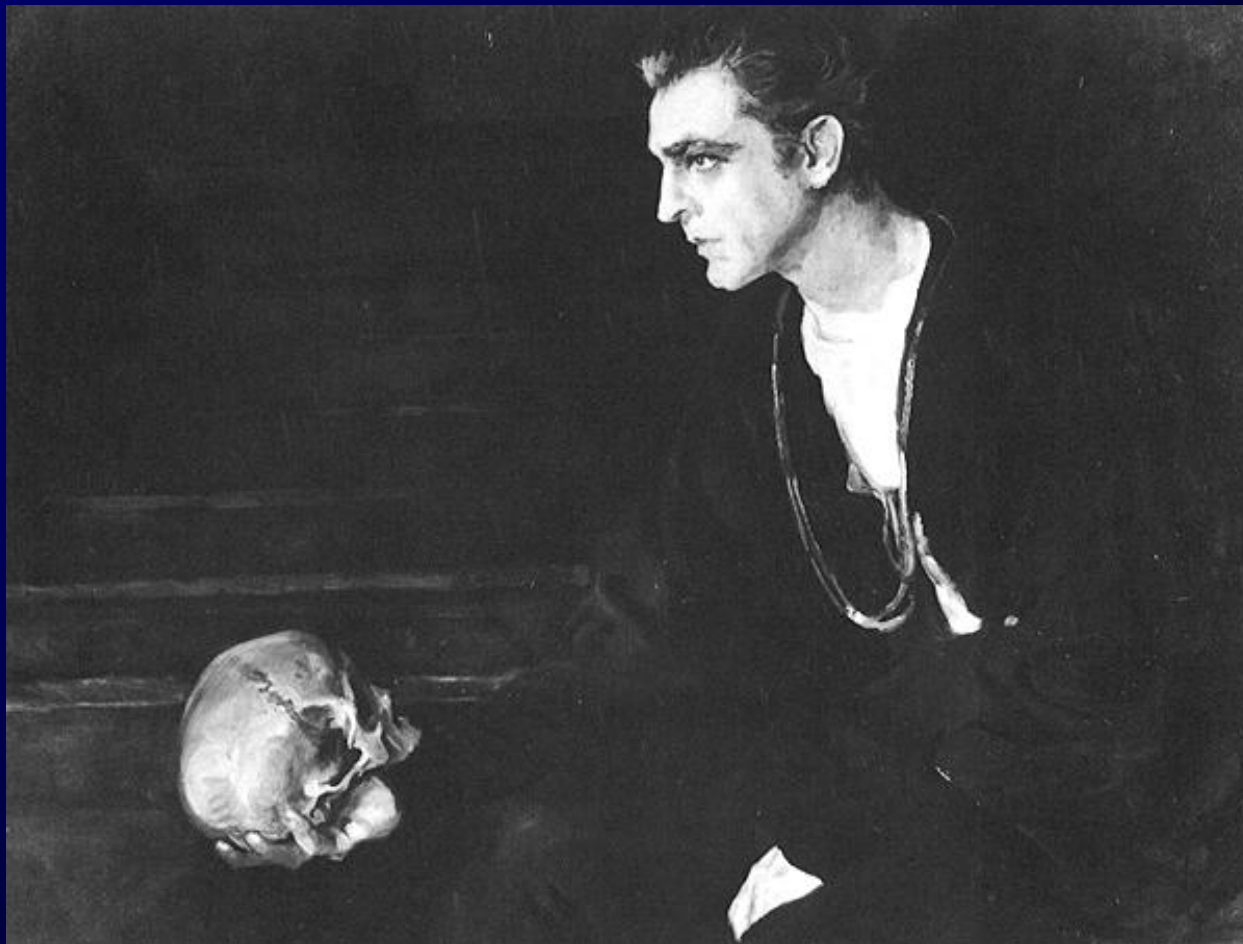
And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor---





Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say,
' That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant at all. '





No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;



Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--
Almost, at times, the Fool.

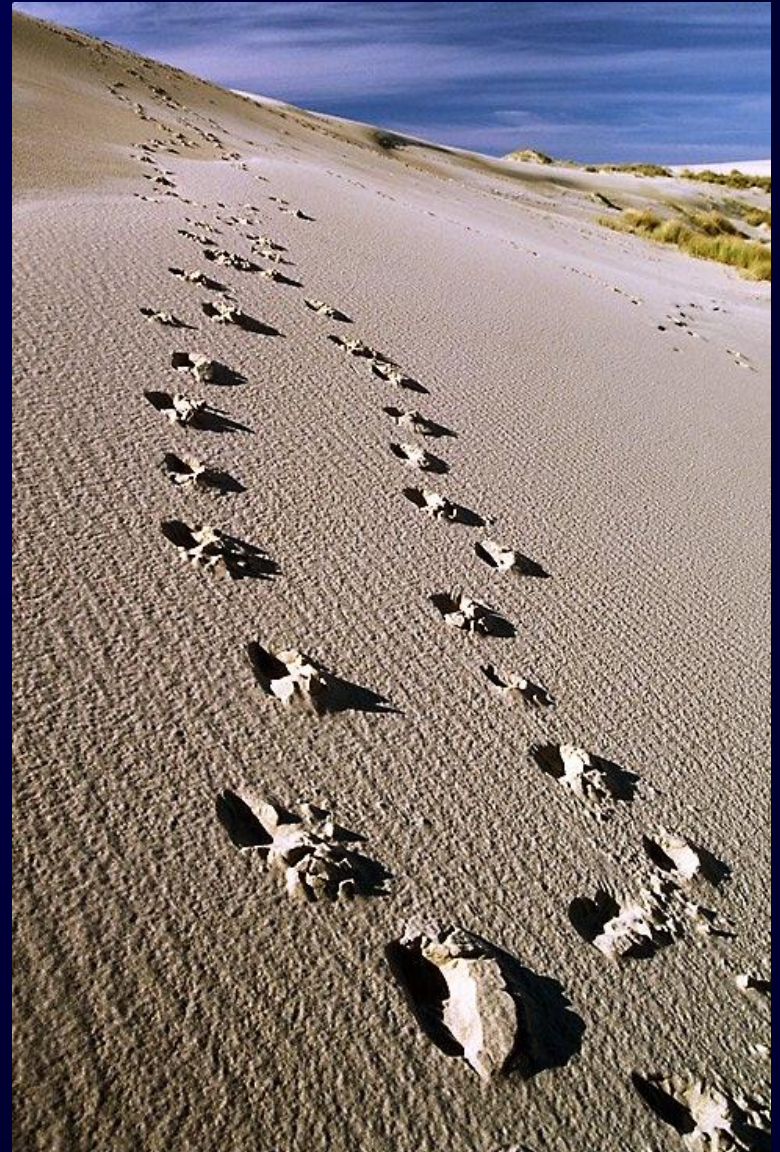
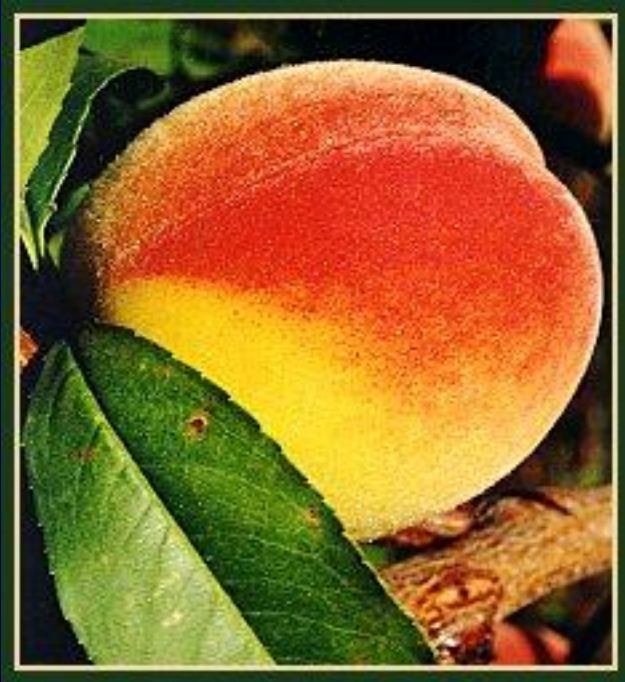


I grow old...I grow old...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled



Shall I part my hair behind? Do I **dare** to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

Earlier, he'd wondered if
he *dared* disturb the
universe.



I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.







I'M STANDING IN A RECORD STORE DOWNTOWN, STARING AT THIS AMAZING GIRL. THERE SHE IS, TWO AISLES AWAY: MY ABSOLUTE DREAM GIRL.

I DESPERATELY WANT TO TALK TO HER, BUT WHAT CAN I SAY? YOU DON'T JUST STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE IN A RECORD STORE. BESIDES, SHE'D PROBABLY THINK I WAS SOME LONELY GEEK TRYING TO HIT ON HER.

I NONCHALANTLY STEP CLOSER, PRETENDING TO SEARCH FOR SOME ELUSIVE ALBUM IN THE "M" SECTION. I GLANCE DOWN AND SEE SHE'S CARRYING A JULIANA HATFIELD RECORD. CAN YOU GET MORE PERFECT THAN THAT?

I GUESS SHE'D KINDA BE RIGHT, TOO.